

HOLDER, John
INTERVIEWEE

Interviewer: Andrew Russell
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September 11th 20 year History

Interview # 655

Interviewed:
Transcribed: June 16, 2021
MP3 File format
Length: 00:12:02

Abstract: In his interview with Andrew Russell, Professor Joh Holder discusses his memories and experiences during the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack. Professor Holder describes his experience during the attack and the response of the Winthrop and Rock Hill community.

* This is an edited transcript. Our transcription guidelines are available upon request/on our website.

Time	Keywords
00:00:01	AR: Today is Friday February 12, 2021. This is an oral history interview with John Holder and Andrew Russell is the interviewer. We are going to start off with John, go ahead and state your full name, where you were born and where you grew up.
	JH: John Holder from Rock Hill South Carolina. Lived here about half my life. Have also lived in Connecticut, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Washington D.C., and Charlotte. I've come back to Rock Hill three different times.
00:00:35	AR: Nice little list there. So what brought you to Winthrop initially?
	JH: I moved back to my home town and didn't have a job and heard that Winthrop was hiring somebody as a sabbatical replacement for one semester in the fall of 1995. So I was hired as a temp twenty five and a half years ago, and I'm still here.
00:01:01	AR: That goes into the next question about your connection to Winthrop. Obviously you were here during 9-11, go ahead and tell me what the mood was like that day on campus.

JH: I didn't get to campus until late afternoon. I spent most of the day watching the news coverage at home. I got in and people were horrified. I had two classes in the late afternoon; and two classrooms full of Winthrop students believed that we were at war and they were going to get drafted, including the women.

00:01:48 **AR: That's intense. I was in day 6 of basic training when the attacks happened so I thought we were going to be sped up and out. So how did you initially hear about the attacks?**

JH: I woke up that morning, turned on the Today show. The lead story was that Michael Jordan was coming out of retirement to play in the NBA [National Basketball Association] again and then I channel surfed for a while. Since I didn't have to teach until the late afternoon, I went back to sleep. I woke up somewhere between 10 and 11 [a.m.] and turned on the TV. There was Dan Rather with a picture of some huge smoking thing over his shoulder. The caption said something like north tower has partially collapsed. It took me a minute to process what was going on. What is this huge smoking thing? When I realized what was going on I believe the south tower had already collapsed. That's how I found out about it. I just sat there watching TV for a few hours.

00:03:14 **AR: So what was the first feeling you had after seeing that?**

JH: I was horrified. I felt numb. I had friends who live in New York City. I had friends who work in New York City. I went to college with a couple of people who worked in the World Trade Center and were killed that day. It was just absolute shock and horror beyond anything I have ever experienced.

00:03:46 **AR: I can imagine. How did you find out that—a lot of people initially thought that the planes hit the tower because of pilot error, over correction. How did you find out that it was actually terrorist attacks? How far into the day?**

JH: By the time I got up and turned on the news they had already figured out that this was not an accident. The second plane actually hit the tower live on TV. It was obvious that this was not some horrible coincidence that two planes had run into the World Trade Center by accident an hour apart. It was obvious as soon as I was clued in that this was an act terrorism.

00:04:47 **AR: So how did you feel for the safety of you and your family and the community as a whole?**

JH: I didn't think Rock Hill was going to be a terrorist target. I moved back here from Washington D.C. I was a congressional staffer for a couple of years. I had friends who were still working on Capitol Hill for Congressman John Spratt and Senator Fitz Hollings and a few other people. I was worried for *them* but I didn't think Rock Hill was going to get hit. I didn't worry about myself.

00:05:26 **AR: So you didn't take any actions to ensure safety? You didn't do any kind of lockdown or anything?**

JH: No. They weren't recommending that around here.

00:05:36 **AR: So what's your most vivid memory of that day?**

JH: I think just turning on the TV and seeing it. Just dealing with the shock. The picture of the tower over [Dan] Rather's shoulder is the image I will always remember.

00:06:09 **AR: You told a little bit about the response of Winthrop, about how everybody was just in shock and terrified. Was there anything else? Obviously as a nation we saw more togetherness than we've seen since World War II.**

JH: Yes. September 12th was an amazing day. The flags went up and people were in line to donate blood and everything else you'd expect in a national emergency. There was this great sense of unity although people like Muslims and Sikhs who wore turbans were getting unfairly targeted. That was horrible. That was also an act of terrorism against *those* people. Yes. The national unity was amazing and unfortunately it didn't last.

00:07:19 **AR: So you mentioned that the Muslims and the Sikhs were targets of terrorism. Did any of that happen on campus to your knowledge?**

JH: Not at all.

00:07:31 **AR: What changed here on campus and in the community in the aftermath after September 12th?**

JH: Everybody was just very solemn and shocked. We didn't. Winthrop didn't enact any security protocols that I'm aware of. There were things like candle light vigils. There were other commemorations but life at Winthrop didn't really change.

00:08:06 **AR: Last question that I have: How did your experience affect you personally? Did this do anything to change your point of view on anything?**

JH: [pause] One of my college classmates was killed. Two other people from Haverford that I didn't know but when I saw their pictures I recognized them, having seen them on campus. [sigh] I just... I don't know that it changed my point of view. I tend to be a pretty liberal pacifistic person but I was absolutely convinced that we had to retaliate for this or it would happen again. Then of

course we responded. I can't describe a way in which it changed my point of view in that sense.

00:09:14 **AR: That's all the questions that I have. Is there anything else that you want to share?**

JH: My mother was at a conference at the State Department. She was on a panel and there was an Israeli woman on the panel. They heard this boom off in the distance and nobody paid attention to it except the Israeli woman who dove under the table and covered her head and said 'Get down, get down'. They thought she was crazy. Then they heard a whole bunch of silence. The boom was the plane hitting the Pentagon. Mom was staying at a hotel near the conference, she wanted to get out of that area so she called a friend who lived in upper northwest Washington. Asked if she could spend the night with them. Her friend came and picked her up and they drove up. There was grid locked traffic for hours. There was a gas station along the way that raised its prices to \$11 per gallon. They eventually got prosecuted for price gouging. They're trying to make money in the middle of a god awful emergency. I also remember my upstairs neighbor, I was living in a Yorkshire apartments on Lucas Street, and my upstairs neighbor was a Winthrop student from New York City. She was trying to get through to her parents to make sure they were ok. She didn't have a landline, she only had a cell phone. The cell phone structure in New York City was destroyed by the attack. So she kept calling and couldn't get through and couldn't get through. I saw her outside and she explained what was going on and I invited her in. She got on my landline and eventually got through to her parents and they were fine. Then I heard a story after the fact from a dear friend who lives in lower Manhattan, she was talking about what it was like for her and her kids. After class, a friend of mine's mother had died a couple of days earlier and they had scheduled a funeral reception for the afternoon of September 11th not knowing this was going to happen. I went to church just to pay my respects to my friend and his family. They had opened the church sanctuary for people to go in and pray. Which was a good thing and I did. [pause] That's about it.

00:11:56 **End of Interview**